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New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Rahming (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 131

Global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum seekers

The Acting President: I have the honour to deliver the following short statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson, who, unfortunately, cannot be here today owing to inter-State commitments.

Since the General Assembly last met on this critical agenda item, there has been a continuous flow of irregular migrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands have made the perilous journey, and hundreds have lost their lives attempting to do so. The drivers causing these people to flee their homes and homelands have continued unabated, as desperate people have sought to find refuge from the plagues of conflict, persecution and endemic poverty. Indeed, indiscriminate attacks against civilians — such as the reported use of chemical weapons in Syria earlier this week — remind us all of the climate of fear that people seek to escape.

In this context, discussions such as this, which seek to promote global awareness of the tragedies unfolding in the Mediterranean basin, are essential. To this end, I wish to acknowledge Turkey's leadership in bringing this agenda item to the General Assembly.

It was this agenda item that served to launch the United Nations intergovernmental process that led to the adoption last September of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1), and through which Member States agreed to develop a global compact for refugees, as well as a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. With the General Assembly's adoption yesterday of the modalities resolution (resolution 71/280) to guide the migration process, Member States will soon begin consultations that will lead to the adoption of the global compact in 2018.

As we embark upon this process, I therefore encourage delegations to remember why it is that we are undertaking this process; to think of the people of Syria and beyond; to recall the tragic events that have driven so many to flee; to understand the impacts being felt by neighbouring countries, which have shouldered so much responsibility; and to therefore bring to the consultations a spirit of humanity, solidarity, and, above all, respect for all migrants' human rights.

In accordance with rule 70 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I now give the floor to Ms. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, to make a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Ms. Viotti: I thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this meeting. I am privileged to be here on behalf of the Secretary-General,

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who, as members know, spent a decade on the front lines of the global refugee crisis. Just last week, he met with Syrian refugees in Jordan and Iraq, where he not only called on the wider international community to increase humanitarian support, but also to make sure that more opportunities are given to refugees.

The General Assembly brought welcome global attention to this issue at its high-level meeting in late 2015. Regrettably, since then, millions of people on the move have continued to suffer. Tens of millions of women, men and children remain uprooted. They have been forced to risk their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea to escape violence, intimidation and discrimination. Refugees and migrants often move along the same routes, facing the same risks and suffering the same human rights violations.

The tragedies and loss of life continue day after day. We are especially appalled at the suffering of the Syrian people, with the war now in its seventh year. Some 11 million Syrians have fled the country. More than 6 million remain displaced inside Syria. Millions have lost their lives, their loved ones, their hope. The misery is immense, but there are also signs of humanity and solidarity.

Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan host the largest numbers of refugees in the region. Their communities have taken extraordinary measures to provide assistance and protection to hundreds of thousands of refugees. We have also seen openness in other parts of the world. These are glimmers of hope in an environment of intensifying xenophobic rhetoric and restrictive policies that fuel violence and discrimination against refugees and migrants.

(*spoke in French*)

As representatives of the international community, we must most strongly condemn any act of violence or discrimination. We must also endeavour to understand why the most vulnerable become scapegoats, and we must try to combat the cause of this phenomenon. When they set out, most refugees and migrants have almost nothing, and the situation when they arrive at their destination is even worse. While they are poor in material terms, too often we forget that refugees and migrants largely make up for that through their energy, their intelligence, their abilities and their culture. It is up to all of us to pay tribute to the contributions made by refugees and migrants to our societies and to encourage citizens in our countries to adopt and promote our common values of tolerance and respect for human dignity.

(*spoke in English*)

That is why the United Nations is carrying out our Together campaign for respect, safety and dignity for those who leave their home and country in search of a better future. Together enables us to join forces in an effort to change negative narratives and attitudes towards refugees and migrants.

The Together campaign goes to the heart of the mission of the United Nations, and Governments are its real stakeholders. I ask members to boost this initiative so that we can rise above the fractured discourse on refugees and migrants and adopt courageous policies that guarantee the safety and security of our citizens without compromising on compassion and empathy. In the words of the Secretary-General: "No country can do it alone, and no country can refuse to do its part".

Member States have embarked on an ambitious path toward the adoption of two global compacts in 2018, one on refugees and one on safe, orderly and regular migration. This commitment represents our best opportunity to improve the lives of the millions of people on the move.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

The United Nations system as a whole stands ready to support Member States in this historic process so that we can move towards a world where human movement is a choice, not a requirement for survival, and where responsibility is shared between countries and communities in which persons can live in security and dignity. Our collective efforts cannot focus only on the symptoms of irregular migration and refugee flows. We must also tackle the underlying reasons that force so many people to move and risk ending up in circumstances that are even more precarious. Prevention is our top priority. In order to keep the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we must not only put an end to conflict; we must also prevent war and support peace.

(*spoke in English*)

We must invest in inclusivity and cohesion, prioritize development, protect human rights and enable all people to realize their potential. This is our shared responsibility. It requires connecting mediation and peace and security efforts with investments in

sustainable development and human rights. When we protect human rights and defend human dignity, we enable people to flourish where they are. They can help build a future of peace and sustainable development. Let us help to create opportunities wherever refugees and migrants live, so that they do not feel compelled to take dangerous journeys elsewhere. Let us uphold the right to asylum and non-refoulement, and let us counter hatred, racism and xenophobia with a commitment to tolerance, inclusion and humanity.

The Acting President: I thank the Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General for her statement.

As announced by the President of the General Assembly in a letter dated 3 April 2017, at this stage of the meeting and before hearing from Member States in the debate, I intend to give the floor to the observer of the International Organization for Migration. Members will recall resolution 47/4, of 16 October 1992, on the participation of the International Organization for Migration in the sessions and work of the General Assembly, and resolution 70/296, of 25 July 2016, on the relationship between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, and without setting a precedent, to invite the observer of the International Organization for Migration to make a statement at this stage of the meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to the observer of the International Organization for Migration.

Mr. Nour (International Organization for Migration): I would like to begin by making the following points. The first is that global population displacement is now at a record high. The share contributed by Syria and its region to that group of people is one of the largest. The tragedies of displaced people, refugees and migrants are heartbreaking and call for urgent attention and action if we are to alleviate their human suffering. The human cost can no longer be borne and should be of concern to us all.

Secondly, the Mediterranean continues to be at the forefront of large refugee and migratory movements. In 2015, the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe totalled more than 1 million, and we reached a turning point. In 2016, they were followed by another 365,000, and so far this year, through the end of March, more than 29,000 people have arrived in Europe. All of that adds not only to their already large numbers but, more importantly, to the complexity and impact of irregular migration in the region and elsewhere in the world.

Thirdly, human mobility generally, and irregular migration in particular, is one of the least visible movements of populations and is difficult to quantify. One of its most reliable indicators is the number of people apprehended at international borders. The limitation of that methodology is that it tells us a lot about the numbers but not so much about people's increasing vulnerability, especially that of women and children. One fifth of those who reached Europe in 2015 were children, and in 2016 that increased to 37 per cent, many of them unaccompanied minors or children separated from their families.

On a more positive note, migration is, in general, overwhelmingly a positive phenomenon, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized the positive contributions that migrants make to both their home and their host countries, as well as the fact that migration is a human reality of great relevance to development. Target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda, in particular, calls on Member States to develop well-planned migration policies so as to facilitate safe, orderly migration, and we stand ready to work with Governments in order to mainstream migration into their national development processes.

The United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants, held in the General Assembly on 19 September of last year, was a unique opportunity for Member States to come together to address the conditions that create or exacerbate large movements of refugees and migrants. It broke new ground in coming up with ways for dealing with migration more collaboratively. As things stand now, the processes are already in motion for developing a global compact for sharing responsibility for refugees and another on global migration, both to be achieved by 2018. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the two co-facilitators of the modalities for the adoption of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration on their reappointment and Ms. Louise Arbour, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration, on her appointment as Secretary-General of the global compact conference.

On a less positive note, I would like to express our concern about the fact that, despite all of the international community's efforts, human trafficking continues to be a global problem that affects many areas of the world, including countries in crisis, where we urge humanitarian actors to prioritize the issue, especially its prevention, and to confront it early in the humanitarian-response process rather than later on. We also call on donors to treat combating human trafficking as a lifesaving measure eligible for emergency financing, and on humanitarian and development actors to work together to address human trafficking before, during and after a crisis emerges.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the support of the International Organization for Migration for the Secretary-General's Together campaign, which we are already actively engaged in and contributing to. We also stand ready to work with all Member States so as to end all forms of discrimination against migrants and refugees, and to work together to change the current toxic narrative of migration to one that is more positive and tolerant.

The Acting President: As also announced by the President of the General Assembly in his letter dated 3 April 2017, I now intend to give the floor to Mr. Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, and without setting a precedent, to invite the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Mr. Türk (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): I would like to thank the President for giving the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the opportunity to address the General Assembly today on an issue that is obviously very close to our heart. We are also grateful to the Government of Turkey for proposing this agenda item in 2015 and, it has to be said, for having generously hosted millions of refugees for decades, in particular the almost 3 million Syrian refugees whom it has sheltered over the past couple of years.

The Mediterranean Sea is symbolic on many fronts. It joins three continents and, since antiquity, has given birth to civilizations and world religions. Migrations across its waters facilitated intercultural, social, and economic exchanges that allowed many civilizations to flourish. In that sense, the Mediterranean Sea might be seen as one of the symbols of the common heritage of humanity.

At the same time, the Mediterranean has, of late, also become a symbol of another kind of human movement — that of forced displacement. It epitomizes both the hopes and losses that come with flight, human mobility, displacement from one's community and the search for safety across borders and even seas. More than one million refugees crossed the Mediterranean in 2015 alone. The majority of them originated in the Syrian Arab Republic, where nearly one half of the population is now displaced. Although the number of arrivals in Europe decreased in the past year by nearly two thirds overall, people — both migrants and refugees — continue to cross the Mediterranean and, tragically, continue to die in the process. Last year, more individuals — more than 5,000 — died in the crossings than in 2015 at the height of the movements.

It is essential that we counter the narrative of unmanageable crisis and the rhetoric of isolationism and that we reframe our understanding of the situation in the Mediterranean. We can demonstrate that it is possible to address such movements of people with the right systems in place and a willingness to cooperate. In that respect, the Mediterranean Sea is also a symbol of the potential for collective action and responsibility — sharing in the face of the challenges of mixed movements and the particular challenges caused by forced displacement.

Last December, UNHCR presented, within the context of the discussions in Europe, a number of proposals aimed at contributing to the rebuilding of trust through better management, partnership and solidarity. Such cooperation is necessary not only in Europe, but also around the Mediterranean and globally. That was recognized and has been mentioned already several times. It was recognized in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which

was adopted on 19 September 2016. In fact, the New York Declaration marked an important turning point in our collective thinking, encouraging us to move from seeing large-scale movements as a crisis to accepting displacement as a reality of today's world and as a phenomenon that we can and must address with thoughtfulness and equanimity.

Against that background and building on the New York Declaration, it may be timely to explore the prospects for developing a comprehensive regional approach for the situation of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea. That is particularly needed for the Central Mediterranean, where the number of arrivals is clearly higher now than at this time last year. We also know that the movements are of a mixed nature. Seventy-three per cent of arrivals in Europe in 2017 have gone through the Central Mediterranean route. Already, more than 31,000 migrants and refugees have arrived by sea in Europe during the first quarter of this year — much higher than in the comparable period of last year.

The situation in the Central Mediterranean speaks to the importance of ensuring that refugees are able to get on with their lives wherever they are, or that they are able to find alternative safe pathways of admission, so that they do not have to risk their lives in trying to reach safety elsewhere. The situation also shows why safe and regular pathways, such as resettlement, humanitarian admission and family reunification, as well as building dignified lives in countries beyond the immediate region, are essential. A regional approach would need to address those goals. It would require the participation of host countries, countries of transit and countries of destination on both sides of the Mediterranean. It would also bring to bear a number of the elements that are reflected in the New York Declaration.

There is a need to stabilize the situations in countries where refugees first seek protection or through which they transit. The stability and security situation in Libya, for example, needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Refugees and migrants have reported being kidnapped, detained, exploited, or sold to criminal networks before being smuggled across the Central Mediterranean. Reception capacity is, therefore, extremely important, as well as alternatives to detention.

Refugees also need to benefit from access to functioning asylum systems everywhere. Without safety, access to basic rights or the regularization of their status, they will be compelled to move onward to other countries. We also need to ensure that they have access to education — which is one of the main drivers behind onward movement — so that they are able to support themselves and get on with their lives.

Many host countries in the neighbourhood of the Mediterranean — particularly in the Middle East, where most refugees are located — require continued support. Through timelier financial assistance and strengthened cooperation between humanitarian and development actors, as was just demonstrated this week at the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, the international community can play a key role in making sure that the critical needs of refugees and the communities that host them can be met.

Finally, all States on both sides of the Mediterranean can play a part in effecting a regional mechanism for search and rescue, which would include sharing responsibilities for the deployment of ships, as well as committing to receive individuals who have been rescued. There are opportunities to forge such arrangements that would more equitably distribute international responsibilities. For example, where countries of disembarkation have more limited reception capacities, we could conceive of creative arrangements for the temporary stay and possible resettlement of the refugees disembarked, especially those who are most at risk, as well as for the assisted voluntary return of migrants.

In conclusion, the Mediterranean must not be only a symbol of the complex world of conflict, violence and displacement in which we are living. It must also be a harbinger of hope for a different kind of engagement — one that is rooted in a deep sense of responsibility to one another and founded in a spirit of compassion and fundamental humanitarian values.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Parenti (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States.

The Syrian conflict has triggered an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that has uprooted many thousands of people, displacing them within their territory, and confronting Syria's immediate neighbourhood, as well

as that of Europe, with major migratory challenges requiring a collective response. The EU member States just endorsed a new strategy for Syria on Monday 3 April. The European Council conclusions of April 2015 confirmed the need for a new, comprehensive and balanced external migration policy aimed at addressing those challenges.

We have therefore strengthened our policies and instruments and put in place new comprehensive initiatives, both internally and externally, with a view to stemming the irregular migration flows, while ensuring full respect for fundamental and human rights. The European Agenda on Migration, the subsequent conference on the Western Balkans migration route of October 2015 and the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016 are key initiatives to be seen in that context.

We recognize and greatly value the action taken by countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan in hosting large numbers of refugees. Forcibly displaced Syrians account for more than 2.7 million of the refugees in Turkey, more than 650,000 in Jordan and more than 1 million in Lebanon. The European Union made significant financial support available in 2016 in order to ensure that those countries were able to provide adequate support to those in need. We are continuing our cooperation with Turkey on establishing legal avenues and on reducing irregular migration, which are the basic principles in the EU-Turkey statement. The number of crossings from Turkey to Greek islands, and the related losses of life, have fallen substantially, although they have not stopped altogether.

The EU will continue to work to provide adequate legal pathways, such as through resettlement, and particularly for people in need of international protection, in order to contribute to international efforts in line with the commitments made in September under the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1). The EU is building on existing efforts, such as the implementation by EU member and associated States, which began in July 2015, of the first EU-wide resettlement scheme, with places for 22,504 people. Discussions are also ongoing in the EU on establishing a permanent resettlement and humanitarian admission framework. This week, the EU hosted a ministerial conference in Brussels on supporting the future of Syria and the region, which brought together representatives of 70 countries and organizations. It was co-chaired by Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom, together with the United Nations, with the presence of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria.

In the wake of the shock of the recent chemical attack in Idlib in Syria, the international community sent a strong message of recommitment to working together to support a peaceful future for Syria and all Syrians in a sovereign, independent, unified and territorially integrated country in which all Syrians can live in peace and security. The Brussels conference also recognized that the humanitarian and resilience needs of vulnerable people in Syria and in the region, especially women and children, have never been greater. The participants agreed that significant financial support, as well as innovative and holistic approaches, are needed if we are to meet the massive needs of populations both inside Syria and in its neighbours, particularly Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Support will continue to be given to Jordan and Lebanon's economic development in order to help them handle the impact of this protracted crisis and to create opportunities for Syrians to find livelihoods. The conference welcomed the progress that has been made in opening labour markets to refugees and agreed to support job-creation programmes aligned with the social and economic development strategies of the host countries' Governments. The participants' generosity resulted in €5.6 billion, or around $6 billion, being pledged for 2017.

But the current challenges go beyond the Syrian refugee crisis, and there is a clear need to address the long-term underlying causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, as well as to tackle the short-term challenges. That is what we are doing through the Migration Partnership Framework approach endorsed by the EU Heads of State and Government in June 2016, an ambitious strategy based on the concept of partnership and cooperation with countries of origin and transit. We are implementing it in a first group of priority countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with the aim of addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, fighting smugglers and trafficking, ensuring the protection of those who need it, promoting people's effective return and readmission, and opening legal migration pathways where appropriate. It is a holistic, tailored approach that is also aimed at helping our partners to develop socioeconomically viable solutions in the countries concerned.

Building on that work, the EU is stepping up its efforts to address irregular migration flows along the route through the central Mediterranean, while remaining

vigilant about routes in the eastern Mediterranean and elsewhere, as set out in a Commission communication of 25 January and our subsequent adoption in February of the Malta Summit Declaration. The principles remain the same. They include launching a number of concrete operations aimed at saving lives, stepping up the fight against smugglers and traffickers in the Mediterranean, ensuring that migrants are treated in compliance with human rights and humanitarian assistance obligations, and improving border management in close cooperation with North African countries, especially Libya. All of those actions include a cross-cutting human-rights dimension. The EU is working closely on the ground with its international implementing partners, especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, to improve refugee and migrant living conditions and ensure their protection, in full compliance with our obligations under international law.

We are committed to working together to see the process succeed in an effort to move towards global governance of human mobility, recognizing that while States have the right and responsibility to manage and control their borders, we must, as an important element of their security, ensure that border-control procedures are implemented in conformity with the applicable obligations under international law, including international human rights and refugee law and in particular the principle of non-refoulement, as established by the 1951 Refugee Convention. The large movements of refugees and migrants represent both a global challenge and an opportunity. They can be addressed by the international community only as a whole, based on the principles of global responsibility-sharing and on finding collective solutions that also commit countries to uphold the safety, dignity and human rights of refugees and migrants.

Migration is indeed inevitable and necessary. If managed in an orderly and sustainable way, it is also desirable. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants builds on that recognition and provides an overall political framework for tackling all of the many different aspects of such movements. The EU stands behind the Declaration as an excellent, balanced basis for collective multilateral action and is fully engaged in the work of developing future United Nations global compacts for refugees and migrants.

In that context, we remain concerned about the growing trend towards racism and xenophobia, which target migrants in particular and can be observed in EU countries as well. Together with our member States, we are especially focused on the New York Declaration's commitment to countering acts and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against refugees and migrants, and we have already done a great deal in that regard, both within the EU and together with our external partners, particularly with regard to preventing and countering prejudice, hate crimes and hate speech.

Those efforts include creating platforms such as an EU High-level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, which is aimed at fostering peer learning and the exchange of best practices among member States, civil society and international partners, at mounting targeted action against the spread of illegal hate speech on the Internet, and at launching initiatives aimed at promoting balanced narratives and a pluralistic media environment that can promote a well-informed public debate around such issues. A hate-crime training guide for law-enforcement and criminal-justice authorities, an overview of resources and initiatives for supporting hate-crime training programmes in EU member States, and a first implementation report on the effectiveness of the EU code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online have already been published and are available on the High-level Group's website. EU policies are also evidence-based, and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights regularly provides data and reports on developments relating to migration and hate crime.

We firmly believe that our approach and activities, notably the engagement with partners under the Partnership Framework approach, which takes into account the wider geographical aspects of migration management, constitute an important contribution and will link up naturally with the new global compacts that we are jointly shaping. Large movements of refugees and migrants are the new reality, and we will all have to act in solidarity and unity in a broad multilateral context. Only through effective multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core, and by embedding migration fully in our respective foreign policies and relations, will we be able to achieve our collective goals.

Mr. Erginay (Turkey): It is a great pleasure for me to attend this timely meeting of the General Assembly. I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening it and the Chef de

Cabinet, the Assistant High Commissioner of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the observer of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for their remarks. I would also like to say that Turkey welcomes the appointment of Ms. Louise Arbour as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration. She will play an important role in coordinating the United Nations system's efforts. We would also like to express our thanks to Sir Peter Sutherland, who made every possible effort in his capacity as the previous Special Representative.

Today's debate is another important step in our efforts to save the lives of migrants and refugees. It is the second time that the General Assembly has convened under this agenda item, and it represents the first opportunity to discuss the issue of migrants and refugees in the Assembly since the 19 September Summit last year. The Assembly will recall that Turkey proposed including the item on the agenda for the seventieth session. The previous debate provided an opportunity for then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to present his road map for addressing the issue of large movements of refugees and migrants, and the process that followed resulted in the Assembly's adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1).

International migration and the ongoing refugee crisis continue to be major themes at the global and domestic levels. Over the past two years, the international community has signed on to important commitments. In September 2015, the States Members of the United Nations unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which endorsed a set of goals. We should not forget that the 2030 Agenda also included some migration-related targets — particularly targets 8.8, on the rights of migrant workers, and 10.7, on well-managed migration — which should be seen as examples of progress on our joint efforts.

The first ever World Humanitarian Summit, hosted by Turkey in May 2016, focused global attention on exploring ways and means to better deliver and harmonize humanitarian aid and development assistance. It generated more than 3,000 commitments to action, but one message in particular resounded loudly and clearly — that of "One Humanity, Shared Responsibility". The 19 September Summit and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants also provided a demonstration of the international community's concrete commitments and political will to address the needs of migrants and refugees, as well as a testament to the importance of responsibility and burden-sharing. It is now high time to put our commitments into action. We believe that today's meeting and the upcoming consultations and negotiations on two global compacts on migration and refugees represent historic milestones.

The scale of global displacement today is profound. Some people move of their own will, but millions leave to escape armed conflict, poverty, food and water insecurity, persecution, terrorism or natural disasters. The total number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide exceeds 65 million, and of those, more than 21 million are refugees and 3 million asylum-seekers. Those numbers are soaring every day, amid a lack of funding and appropriate protection mechanisms. The conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, the Lake Chad basin and several other countries and regions, as well as protracted situations such as that of the Palestinian refugees, continue to be sources of persistent concern. Indeed, the conflict in Syria has entered its seventh grim year. Since March 2011, Syrians have watched as huge parts of their beloved country have been reduced to rubble. Hundreds of thousands have been killed. More than 6 million people are displaced within Syria and around 5 million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

The regime's relentless attacks on its own people continue. Turkey strongly condemns the chemical-weapon attacks perpetrated on 4 April by the Syrian regime in Khan Shaykhun, which claimed the lives of innocent civilians, including children. The use of toxic chemicals as a weapon constitutes a war crime, a crime against humanity and a violation of international law. It is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and defies the relevant Security Council resolutions. It also constitutes a grave violation of the ceasefire regime in Syria. The erosion of the ceasefire carries with it the risk of further movements of Syrians. Turkey will fully support any steps aimed at ensuring accountability and preventing impunity in cases involving such crimes. In order to save their lives and build a future for their children, refugees resort to desperate methods and take dangerous journeys. According to IOM data, in 2016 recorded migrant deaths increased by 27 per cent worldwide compared to the previous year. Sadly, as was mentioned earlier, more than 5,000 migrants lost their lives in the Mediterranean in 2016.

We cannot turn a blind eye to their plight. First and foremost, it is our shared responsibility to save their lives. For centuries, Turkey has made every effort to help people in need and will continue to do so. In that understanding, Turkey today hosts the largest number of refugees in the world, almost 3.2 million. We aim to prevent deaths while exploring ways and means to find and create better opportunities for migrants and refugees. I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to some figures. Between 2005 and 2016, a span of 10 years, the number of irregular migrants apprehended while attempting to cross our territory was approximately 850,000. In 2016 alone, the Turkish authorities prevented more than 170,000 irregular crossings. In 2016, the Turkish Coast Guard rescued approximately 40,000 migrants on the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. The figures speak for themselves and show the necessity and importance of the Turkey-European Union (EU) cooperation, which culminated in the agreement of 18 March 2016. We have three main humanitarian objectives for that cooperation — preventing the loss of lives in the Aegean Sea, breaking the migrant smuggling networks and replacing illegal migration with legal migration.

Today, our endeavours are bearing fruit. We have managed to prevent the loss of lives in the Aegean, crush migrant smuggling rings and replace irregular migration with regular migration. Since October 2016, the average number of irregular crossings has fallen from 7,000 a day to fewer than 100. In the period from the beginning of 2015 until 18 March 2016, more than 1,000 irregular migrants died in the Aegean Sea. Since the agreement of 18 March, the total loss of life in those waters has been 31. Overall, in one year, our efforts had a deterrent effect on more than 1 million irregular migrants trying to reach European Union territory, and as a result, arrivals in the EU dropped by 99 per cent. The agreement sent a clear message to migrant smugglers that the Aegean Sea will no longer be a place where they can profit from desperate people or conduct business.

The situation in Syria and that of its refugees is the most immediate challenge we are facing today. Despite the difficulties it represents for our national security, economy and social fabric, we have maintained our open-door policy for Syrians who have had to flee their country. Today, Turkey is home to more than 2.9 million Syrians, corresponding to about 15 per cent of their pre-war population. That is more than the population of about 100 individual countries around the world. Only 10 per cent of Syrians in Turkey are accommodated in temporary protection centres; the rest live in urban areas. Every single Syrian in Turkey is under our Government's protection regime. There are currently approximately 835,000 school-age Syrian children in Turkey, and 508,000 of them attend public schools.

Over the past six years, we have provided Syrians with more than 20 million polyclinic services, and more than 1 million have received inpatient treatment. Around 200,000 Syrian babies have been born in Turkey, more than the demographic growth of some European countries. We not only provide Syrians with food, non-food items, medical and education services, we also enable them to contribute legally to our economy. The Turkish Government, together with Turkish non-governmental organizations and municipalities, has so far spent a total of $26 billion on those efforts. That is close to the total yearly budget of about 150 individual countries. And in that regard, I have to say that the international community, and the EU in particular, has miserably failed the test of burden-sharing.

As I have said, Turkey is keen to extend a helping hand to all people in need. As a result, we are actively supporting the development and humanitarian work for 5.3 million Palestinian refugees being done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The Agency's role requires the continuing generosity of the international community. Our motivation is simple. It is to protect human dignity. That is why we call on all stakeholders to share the responsibility for ending the plight and suffering of millions of people in need, because one day it could happen to any of us.

Migration is as old as humankind. It will neither vanish nor end. It is therefore our collective responsibility and duty to work together to find appropriate responses to its challenges. Safe, regular, orderly and legal migration paths will undoubtedly serve our common interests. It is in that understanding that Turkey assumed the 2014-2015 chairmanship of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. During our chairmanship, the concept of "forced migration" was worked out for the first time. Moreover, we chair the Budapest Process on orderly migration, which brings together more than 50 countries and 10 international organizations in Europe and Asia.

We recently organized a Budapest Process consultation meeting and assessed the input that the Budapest Process can provide to the future global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. In that regard, we wish to stress that, as an active international player with wide-ranging experience on the issues of migration and refugees, Turkey is ready and eager to provide concrete contributions to the consultations and negotiations processes for the two global compacts on those issues. To that end, we have informed the President of the General Assembly of our desire to moderate at least one of the panels at the discussions to be held during the consultations process of the global compact on migration.

The global compact process needs to be inclusive, transparent and comprehensive. We urge all stakeholders to work together, benefit from the expertise of the International Organization for Migration and the relevant United Nations Secretariat units and create a favourable atmosphere for migrants. The same is valid for the global compact for refugees. The road map provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the development of the global compact for refugees provides a basis for inputs. The consultations on the global compact for refugees must also be inclusive and take into account the views of host countries, inter alia. Furthermore, we encourage the successful development and implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, which will also take into consideration the long-term needs of refugees and those who host them.

While working to find proper and just ways to end the suffering of millions of people, what we need is comprehensive and durable migration policies. To that end, we should, first of all, give top priority to saving lives and providing protection for those who need it, which includes better equipping ourselves to save and protect the lives of people, as well as executing functional, quick and equitable resettlement programmes.

The second important aspect is responsibility and burden-sharing. Let me underscore that the international responsibility for refugees and migrants stems not from geographical proximity, but from humanitarian values that are a manifestation of our collective conscience. In that respect, we believe that the international community should step up its efforts in terms of humanitarian financial aid.

The third objective should be to eliminate the "push factors", such as wars and conflicts, human rights violations, economic deprivation and the negative effects of climate change experienced by many of the countries of origin. While addressing the drivers of migration, it is of utmost importance that destination countries support peace processes and promote the peaceful settlement of disputes in conflict-affected areas, as well as that they ensure the delivery of development assistance to the countries in need. International assistance should be a long-term investment in our collective security, peace and prosperity.

Fourthly, we should exert every possible effort to open and secure more regular channels of migration as viable alternatives to irregular migration. It is our duty to give people with certain levels of skill the chance to migrate legally and safely. Recognition of migrants as key actors in development is a critical first step towards harnessing the potential of migrants to contribute to the development of home and host countries. In that respect, it is important to lower the costs of remittances, enhance financial literacy and the portability of social benefits, and promote the recognition of skills and migrants' rights.

Lastly, we should refrain from poisonous rhetoric and attitudes towards migrants and refugees. Unfortunately, in times of turmoil and uncertainty, we observe that migrants and refugees become scapegoats. We see a rising trend of discrimination, xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism. Such dangerous trends naturally affect the Mediterranean basin as much as other corners of the globe. They are fuelled by the populist rhetoric of the extremist/populist parties and by biased media portrayals, all of which represents a huge challenge to democracies everywhere. The fear and rejection of refugees, especially Muslim refugees, is precisely the wrong answer to extremist threats. This is, above all, a battle of values; if we lose our values, we lose the battle.

We can correct such negative stereotyping. We all need to push for a more forward-looking and positive understanding of migration and refugee flows. Protecting human rights, dignity and the well-being of migrants is directly linked to their capacity to take active part in the economic and social life of host countries. It is with those thoughts in mind that we co-sponsored with Spain the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Moreover, we believe that the United Nations Together campaign is a significant effort to

mobilize the United Nations system to create a strong and persuasive narrative of solidarity towards refugees and migrants.

The time is ripe for taking bold decisions and putting them into action. It is the responsibility of each and every individual and country to extend a helping hand to people in need. We should work together to protect the lives and dignity of the migrants, be they regular, irregular or forced to displace. If we join our efforts, we can prevent them from taking dangerous journeys, most of which cost them their lives, and stop smugglers from profiting from the vulnerabilities of helpless people.

Mrs. Shurbaji (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, the Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest possible terms the action by the United States of America that took place this past Friday morning, which was a planned act of aggression that stands in contradiction with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as with that country's role as a permanent member of the Security Council. The attack was against air bases of the Syrian Arab Republic in the centre of the country, following the episode of chemical-weapons use at Khan Shaykhun.

That event was a pretext promoted by Washington, D.C., Tel Aviv, Riyadh, Doha, Ankara, Paris and the mass media. The Syrian Government has confirmed that the Syrian Arab Republic does not possess any chemical weapons and has never used such weapons in any way in any of its operations against terrorist armed groups. It condemns the use of such weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances. My delegation confirms that such aggression could lead to the spread of chaos all over the world and will allow the law of the jungle to be the way the world deals with economic and international crises instead of respecting the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of international law.

My delegation would like to express its appreciation of all serious efforts aimed at finding radical solutions and realistic approaches to the question of refugees and migrants. It confirms its rejection of the focus on Syrian asylum-seekers. That is a dangerous political precedent in terms of the United Nations agenda. The question of refugees is properly discussed under certain specific agenda items, especially since the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1).

Statistics have proved that Syrians constitute only 20 per cent of refugees and migrants moving from the Middle East towards Europe through Turkey, whereas the remaining 80 per cent are mainly of African and Asian origin. Why focus then on Syria? The reason is that powerful countries at the United Nations would like to prolong discussions and impede the achievement of objectives at the political level, all at the expense of the Syrian people, not to mention the practices of certain countries aimed at politicizing this humanitarian dossier by exaggerating the numbers of refugees for political and economic reasons, starting from obtaining financial assistance and using these refugees to exert pressure or engage in political blackmail at the international level and to conclude swapping agreements that run counter to human rights principles.

The Turkish Government has set aside the question of refugees in its discussion with the European Union. Top Turkish officials have threatened European countries with the opening of their shores and borders before new waves of refugees arrive, thereby transferring the crisis to Europe. That suggests that Turkey is cooperating with the human-trafficking mafias. In fact, the Turkish Government wants to force the European States to do whatever it wants under the so-called European Union-Turkey migration deal. The deal forced the issue of Syrian asylum-seekers intentionally into this agenda item. It reveals a contradiction between those countries that claim to be concerned about the Syrian people and their own illegal practices. Turkey is pressuring asylum-seekers by using unilateral measures, financing terrorists and ignoring its commitments vis-a-vis the Syrians. We should also mention the confiscation by some countries of the savings of Syrian refugees, as little as they might be.

Finding a radical solution to the refugee and migrant crisis means that the reasons pushing tens of thousands of persons to leave their countries and homes looking for alternative options should receive international attention. Terrorism, conflicts and wars are first among those reasons, in addition to the unilateral economic pressures that have become the means that influential countries use to impose their will on developing countries and achieve their political agendas, in the Middle East region in particular.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has assumed its full responsibility for protecting its citizens by providing a decent life for them and by continuously working with its international and local

partners in creating the best conditions for the refugees to return. The Syrian Arab Republic very much wants all of its citizens to return to their country after fleeing their homeland because of the terrorist groups and the difficult circumstances. The latter have arisen as a result of the European Union and the United States of America's imposition of a package of forced unilateral measures, which have contributed to preventing Syrians from being able to meet their needs in food, medicine, energy and to preventing the implementation of development programmes for Syria, especially for the displaced and those affected.

In that respect, the Syrian Government reiterates its call on all Syrians outside Syria to return to their homeland. And it continues its efforts to rehabilitate and reconstruct the areas that have been affected by the actions of terrorist armed groups. We would like to state our readiness to cooperate with the Governments of countries hosting Syrian refugees, since they are an important factor in finding a procedure that would allow such refugees to return to their home countries.

In conclusion, those who want to find a solution to the problem of Syrian refugees have to take the necessary measures, in accordance with Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism, especially resolution 2253 (2015), which includes controlling their borders, stopping the influx of foreign terrorists, preventing the arming and financing operations of terrorist groups, lifting unilateral economic pressures, supporting the political processes aimed at ending terrorism and finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis under Syrian leadership, without foreign intervention. We confirm to the international community that, when all those circumstances converge, the majority of the Syrians would prefer to return to their homeland to live in dignity, peace and prosperity.

Mr. Minami (Japan): Let me begin by thanking the President for convening this meeting. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, to the representative of the International Organization for Migration and to the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for their statements.

The number of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, moving from east to west and from south to north, remains high. Such journeys are perilous, and many migrants meet a tragic fate before reaching their destination. We therefore feel that it is meaningful to have a discussion under this agenda item in the General Assembly at its seventy-first session. According to UNHCR statistics, those who are fleeing the conflict in Syria comprise the largest individual group of sea arrivals in the Mediterranean basin. Altogether, those from Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Iraq comprise the majority of all sea arrivals in the region. In the light of the situations surrounding those countries, it is clear that conflict is among the most serious of the root causes of forced migration.

From a global perspective, the wave of international migration is also swelling outside the Mediterranean basin. Whether in Africa or Asia, people are fleeing conflict and violence. In the absence of solutions to such conflicts and violence, people will continue to migrate irregularly. We must always bear in mind that those who cross the treacherous seas are not risking their lives for fun. They are obliged to take such a dire risk in order to escape even greater and more immediate threats behind them.

Alongside any steps that we take to solve the root causes of forced migration, we must also make every effort to alleviate the suffering and risks facing vulnerable migrants who are forced to flee their homelands. States should comply with their obligations under the principle of non-refoulement and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. We should also provide humanitarian assistance to those who suffer from unwilling displacement. Development cooperation with communities hosting refugees is also crucial.

Last year, Japan committed to providing an assistance package of about $2.8 billion between 2016 and 2018 in the form of humanitarian and self-reliance assistance to refugees and migrants, as well as assistance to host countries and communities. During the first quarter of this year alone, Japan has provided $500 million to various humanitarian and development agencies as part of that commitment, and we will continue to steadily implement our promises.

Nearly one year after we held a General Assembly meeting under this agenda item, the international framework for addressing large-scale movements of people has developed significantly. Based on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1), which the Member States adopted on

19 September 2016, the processes aimed at the adoption of the global compact on migration and the global compact on refugees are ongoing. Those two global compacts will serve as a test of whether the United Nations can effectively address irregular migration on a global scale. Our support for those processes, until the adoption of both global compacts next year, is therefore critical. Japan is ready to contribute to those processes by constructively participating in the discussion on the global compacts and by supporting the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework through funding for case-study projects.

Before concluding, I would like to add a few words on internally displaced persons (IDPs). Cross-border movements of people have attracted the attention of the international community, but in fact there are many more IDPs who flee from conflicts and violence and yet remain within the borders of their home countries. We must not forget them when we are discussing the plight of the forcibly displaced. The international community as a whole must make every coordinated effort to ensure that every person forced to leave his or her home — regardless of whether they become international refugees, other vulnerable migrants or IDPs — can enjoy sufficient protections to begin their new lives with dignity.

Mr. Giacomelli da Silva (Brazil): I thank the President for convening this meeting. We welcome the opportunity to hear from the President of the General Assembly, the Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the International Organization for Migration and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the issue of refugees and migrant movements in the Mediterranean basin, in particular the situation of Syrian refugees. The General Assembly should remain engaged on that issue, bearing in mind the follow-up process for the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1) and the negotiation process for the two global compacts on migrants and refugees, to be adopted in 2018.

In the light of its overarching effects on the global management of refugee flows, the situation in the Mediterranean basin is a matter of concern not only for Europe, but for the whole world. It is a challenging situation, but it can be tackled with solidarity and respect for international refugee law.

First and foremost, Brazil would like to recall its shared responsibility to address the movements of refugees and migrants, wherever they occur, in a humane, sensitive, compassionate and people-centred manner. As our heads of State stated in the outcome document (resolution 71/1) of the High-level United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants on 19 September 2016, these are global phenomena that call for global approaches and global solutions. Although their treatment is governed by separate legal frameworks, refugees and migrants have the same universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.

On the American continent, refugees and migrants have contributed to the shaping of our societies. Brazil, for instance, is a country built on the strength of millions of people from all continents. We value that diversity. Refugees and migrants have made — and continue to make — a significant contribution to our development. Even more than that, they are an essential part of our identity. We firmly believe that the coming global compacts must, at their core, underscore the need to respect the human rights of migrants and refugees and promote social inclusion. They must firmly reject the notions and practices of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance. The processes aimed at developing those compacts should provide a comprehensive response to the need to address situations like that in the Mediterranean basin and many others.

The situation of unaccompanied and separated children is particularly delicate. Brazil attaches great importance to that issue and has worked to protect refugee and migrant children's rights throughout the process that led to the adoption of the New York Declaration for Migrants and Refugees. We believe that we can advance even further, especially on the question of the detention of children.

Regarding the global compact on migration, priority must be given to expanding regular channels for migration, including decent work, labour mobility, the recognition of educational and professional skills and the development of alternatives for the regularization of migration status. A robust global compact should envisage the promotion and access of migrants to public services in countries of destination, including access to education, health, work and housing.

Brazil believes that Governments should, in line with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, refrain from using restrictive admission policies or establishing regimes to limit the rights of

those seeking refugee status. Those kinds of measures stimulate human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants. It is thus necessary to establish safe and legal channels for the admission of refugees and migrants, and to guarantee their fundamental rights in the countries of destination.

In that regard, Brazil is aware of and sincere in its commitments. The number of refugee applications received by the Brazilian Government, for instance, has risen by almost 3,000 per cent in the past five years. We have established a humanitarian visa programme, which has allowed for more than 2,500 people affected by the Syrian conflict to have their refugee status recognized so far. Last year, on the occasion of the High-level United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants, held in New York, Brazil committed to receiving an additional 3,000 Syrian refugees and is currently considering resettlement options. We take this opportunity to reiterate our solidarity with the Syrian people and refugees and with their host countries.

In conclusion, Brazil would like to recall that the flows of refugees in several parts of the world are the result of wars, repression and violent extremism — not their causes. The legitimate concerns of Governments for the security of their citizens must respect the inherent rights of every human being. If we abandon the resolute defence of those rights, we will be abandoning our own humanity. In our relations with foreigners, with others, we test our very commitment to those values, our commitment to civilization itself.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Australia welcomes the opportunity that this forum presents to raise awareness of the dangers of irregular migration. While Australia is geographically distant from the Mediterranean basin, the horrific images of people drowning at sea are etched in our minds. As in the Mediterranean, the Asia-Pacific has seen many innocent and desperate people undertaking perilous journeys, often arranged by people smugglers motivated by greed and trading in human misery.

In response, Australia's policies were developed to send an unequivocal message that people smugglers do not offer a path to Australia. The way in which we have responded has been crucial to building the confidence of the Australian people in our migration policy. Large-scale migration and resettlement is not possible unless the community is assured that it is orderly and controlled, carried out for the benefit of all, and importantly, ensures the safety and dignity of those migrating.

Public and community confidence in migration management cannot be overestimated. It has allowed Australia to maintain our high humanitarian intake, and our first-hand experience is that orderly, safe and well-managed resettlement and migration yield positive economic, social and cultural outcomes. In September 2015, Australia committed to resettling an additional 12,000 people displaced by conflicts in Syria and Iraq, including the most vulnerable — persecuted minorities, women, children and families with the least prospect of returning safely to their homes. Australia is delighted that, as of 21 March this year, all 12,000 humanitarian resettlement visas have been issued to such refugees. More than 10,000 of those people now call Australia home, and the remainder will arrive in the coming months. The new arrivals have received a warm welcome from their local communities and are receiving world-class settlement services.

Australia has overseen the largest offshore humanitarian programme in 30 years and remains committed to an increased level of 18,750 places from 2018-2019 onward. Under the annual humanitarian programme and the additional 12,000 places, a total of around 21,500 visas have already been issued to people displaced by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. That represents, however, only one element of Australia's overall response to the humanitarian crisis. Australia is equally focused on the humanitarian and stabilization needs involved in addressing the crises contributing to such mass displacements. We recently began implementation of a $220 million multi-year package, which will provide humanitarian assistance and protection services for people in Syria and neighbouring countries. We do not underestimate the impact of hosting large numbers of refugees. Australia's assistance will also support the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon so that they can improve access to education and livelihood opportunities for refugees and local populations.

Australia is committed to global compacts on refugees and migration that will establish a whole-of-community response aimed at supporting orderly migration and protecting those forcibly displaced. We want the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration to be a practical guide for migration governance, also covering mixed movements and situations of protracted displacement, as well as

addressing irregular and illegal migration issues, including human trafficking. The compact on migration should retain a clear distinction between refugees and migrants, while acknowledging that some migrants in vulnerable situations rely on the international community to address their situation and protect their fundamental human rights. We favour a non-binding, practical compact aimed at improving global migration governance where it is needed most.

For Australia and the Asia-Pacific, building on the good work of the Bali Process, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Budapest Process will be key. The Asia-Pacific will benefit most from action-orientated responses that provide the greatest support to vulnerable people.

Australia sees the global compacts as a turning point in how Governments, international organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations respond to mass displacement. The compacts can increase clarity, predictability and international cooperation in managing mixed migration flows and, in turn, increase public and community confidence in migration.

Mr. Grant (Canada): For most of us in this Hall, crossing a border is little more than an administrative nuisance. And yet, last year, close to 8,000 people died in their attempts to cross an international border. Two thirds of them lost their lives in the Mediterranean alone. We can only imagine the courage that those individuals had to summon to take such a perilous journey. Imagine, as well, how they and we could have prospered if their courage and ingenuity had reached their full potential. Imagine if we had known what their capacities and skills were, what they too could have achieved if they had not died at sea. My question is, therefore, how we should reorient our global approach to migration and displacement so that this full human potential can be harnessed instead of squandered.

Canada sees three key ways to move forward. First, we need ambitious and constructive leadership. With growing xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiment heard around the world, we need to have both public- and private-sector leaders challenge polarized views and promote a more constructive narrative on migration. We look forward to greater collective engagement in the United Nations TOGETHER campaign. We also look forward to the work of the new Special Representative for International Migration, Louise Arbour, who will help to catalyse efforts in that area.

Secondly, as Member States, we need to develop more comprehensive planned national systems of migration that will enable the diversification and expansion of regular legal pathways for migration, including refugee resettlement. Improving regular pathways, while not a panacea, can help to reduce human tragedies and harness the human potential currently remaining untapped or even lost. In the Canadian experience, engaging diverse stakeholders, including at the grass-roots level, in planning and contributing to various stages of migration and refugee processes is a key element of our comprehensive approach.

(*spoke in French*)

Thirdly, we need to achieve more comprehensive responses to refugees and internally displaced persons. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, the commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit and greater engagement by international financial institutions in contexts of forced displacement offer some possibilities for changing the current operating model. However, we need to redouble efforts to mobilize the political will and resources required to translate commitments into significantly improved realities for refugees and host communities.

Canada recognizes its unique geographic position and special history of immigration. We are aware of the significant challenges faced by source, transit and destination countries responding to immigration flows, whether it be along the Mediterranean Basin or beyond.

(*spoke in English*)

We remain ready to exchange best practices and innovative solutions for safe, orderly and regular migration. We also look forward to continued dialogue as we fulfil our New York Declaration (see resolution 71/1) commitments.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Argentine Republic has historically maintained a principled position on the protection of the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. In that regard, it has always supported the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and actively participated in the negotiation process for the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1).

With regard to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Argentina continues to be deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in that country and condemns all acts of violence, including attacks against the civilian population. My country fervently hopes that the recent initiatives to end the violence in Syria and start a political process will give rise to a new phase whose purpose is to end years of disagreements and disunity.

In the past five years, my country has stated in every discussion on Syria that the only solution to the conflict is political and not military, much less terrorist, as the Security Council has also recognized. The refugee crisis in the Mediterranean basin, in particular the aspect of it triggered by the situation in Syria, clearly represents today's greatest humanitarian emergency, causing the displacement of millions of people, both internally and across international borders, who are desperately searching for protection and security. It is a fact that, despite the significant efforts of Syria's neighbours, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, the capacity to receive refugees is overwhelmed by the numbers of displaced persons, which has led to hundreds of thousands of people continuing their journeys, desperately seeking to reach Europe by any means, endangering their lives and those of their families.

Given the need to provide protection for the Syrian population, Argentina has, since 2014, pledged to share in the international responsibility and do its part by admitting refugees from Syria and its neighbouring countries through the implementation of a special humanitarian visa programme for foreigners affected by the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, in 2015 we created an interministerial working group under the Chef de Cabinet of Ministers with the purpose of establishing general guidelines for the humanitarian admission of people who have been displaced as a result of the situation in Syria and proposing ways of ensuring their social inclusion. The ultimate objective is to fully integrate the refugee population into host communities through active participation, coordination and full commitment on the part of every national, state and local authority in every area of the Government.

Argentina is also committed to addressing humanely the needs of those who are most vulnerable, by providing concrete aid in extremely serious humanitarian crises as they occur and to refugee populations in emergency situations. In that regard, our White Helmets are doing crucial work in assisting the most vulnerable. The fact is that more than half of the refugee population are women who, besides being vulnerable as displaced persons, are in more difficult circumstances even when they reach an apparently safe place. The increase in the numbers of unaccompanied or separated children and adolescents seeking refuge is also very worrying. Particular factors such as age, national origin, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and others may also put refugees at risk of being unprotected or discriminated against. We must strengthen our commitments and actions if we are to protect the dignity and human rights of every refugee.

Argentina affirms and acknowledges that despite the complexity of current international flows, we should not confuse refugees with migrants, legally or conceptually. However, it is also important to emphasize that while no country is exempt, regardless of its level of development or international ranking, the reality is that 87 per cent of refugees are being hosted in developing countries and the international community should take that into account as it tries to provide solutions.

We are grateful for this dialogue so that we can continue to come up with concrete responses to what has become the greatest migratory crisis in the world's recent history. Every day we hear about thousands who are suffering and dying in their attempt to save themselves from violence, persecution and poverty. We cannot and should not remain indifferent in the face of that situation. It is time to act.

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): Last week, the United Nations reported that 5 million Syrians had fled to neighbouring countries, a new but sadly unsurprising record high in the light of the devastating ongoing conflict in Syria. The chemical-weapon attack earlier this week is a particularly abhorrent example of the complete disregard for international law that has characterized the Syrian conflict since its beginning. The perpetrators of that and other war crimes must be held accountable, but the Security Council has once again refused to be responsible for that. In the light of the military strikes against Syria, it seems that it will be even more difficult for the Council to agree on a way forward. The Council has continually failed to meet the expectations of the 112 signatories to the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, which constitute a large majority of the United Nations membership. That only adds to the relevance of the code, and I would like to take this

opportunity to once again invite all remaining States to join that initiative.

Combating impunity for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are priorities in Liechtenstein's efforts to mitigate the suffering of refugees and migrants and prevent other crises from erupting. Accountability not only brings justice to victims, it also has a deterrent effect and lays a foundation for reconciliation. Resolution 71/248, which establishes an accountability mechanism for crimes committed in Syria, is an important step in that direction. The mechanism enjoys very broad support among the United Nations membership, both politically and financially, and is a welcome sign that the General Assembly is ready to assume responsibility in the wake of the Security Council's systemic failure to address the crisis in Syria.

Liechtenstein applauds the extraordinary display of solidarity on the part of Syria's neighbours, particularly Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, which continue to welcome Syrian refugees in large numbers. Their commitment reflects our view that every State should contribute in solidarity to the mitigation of the migration and refugee situation. Migration should take place in a safe and orderly manner. States must also uphold their obligations under the relevant international instruments on refugees. We urge all States to participate in resettlement and relocation programmes.

By participating in the resettlement programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Union's relocation scheme, Liechtenstein is contributing to the joint international efforts to address the mass displacement out of Syria. In addition, Liechtenstein has provided more than 2.5 million Swiss francs, or close to $70 per capita, in humanitarian and development aid for projects supporting Syrian refugees that share a long-term perspective and that include schooling for more than 20,000 Syrian refugees and local children in Jordan and Lebanon, building sustainable institutions and promoting women's empowerment. They also help to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which enhances societies' resilience and stability. Through its national policies, Liechtenstein pays particular attention to the speedy integration of refugees and migrants. With our innovative Liechtenstein Languages programme, they can learn the basics of German in just a few weeks, enabling them to quickly interact with the local population and public administration.

Liechtenstein supports the efforts to universalize the Palermo Convention and its Protocols, which provide a key legal framework for combating the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking. Organized crime often targets and exploits the most vulnerable, among them refugees and migrants, and women and children in particular. Far too many of them end up as modern slaves, whether through forced prostitution, forced labour or other forms of slavery. The prohibition of slavery is one of the very rare norms of international law that applies at all times, in all places and to all actors.

States are under a clear legal obligation to criminalize, investigate, prosecute and punish slavery where it occurs. Yet despite that strong universal legal norm, the impunity gap is glaring. To help narrow that gap, Liechtenstein has been pursuing innovative approaches, including involving financial institutions in detecting and disrupting financial flows associated with modern slavery — in other words, following the money. Liechtenstein recently organized a workshop with United Nations University on the topic and will present the results in the framework of the upcoming high-level political forum.

Modern slavery is one of the most egregious human rights violations. We are collectively committed to eradicating it through the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. If we are to succeed, we must focus on the most vulnerable, especially those who are forced to flee conflict, hunger and persecution.

Mr. Amer (Israel): In the past year, the world has been overwhelmed by devastating humanitarian crises, conflicts and sectarian fighting. The turmoil across the Middle East and Africa has left far too many people dead and driven millions more to seek refuge on foreign shores. They are forced to leave behind their families, friends, homes and any remnants of their pre-conflict existence.

The year 2016 has been the deadliest year for refugees who are fleeing war and conflict zones, with more than 5,000 lives tragically lost. The Mediterranean Sea has become a graveyard for countless innocents, especially children, who did not survive the deadly journey. The international community, Governments and non-governmental organizations have made considerable efforts in attempting to address the catastrophe by helping refugees to reach safe shores

and begin rebuilding their lives. However, with the increasing number of refugees and the ongoing violence and suffering in countries that they are fleeing, we are reminded that much more remains to be done.

As I stand here today, Syria continues to bleed. The violence inflicted by the Al-Assad regime, which brutally assaults its own people using conventional and non-conventional weapons, has plunged the country into the worst humanitarian crisis in the history of the Middle East. The massacre of Khan Shaykhun, which transpired just the past week, serves as a reminder that the international community has again failed to stop the Al-Assad regime from continuing to carry out its brutality.

The President of Israel, Mr. Reuven Rivlin, condemned the attack in the strongest way possible:

> "The pictures we are seeing today from Syria and the report of the massacre of civilians, of children, with chemical weapons, are a stain on all humankind. The international community must come together in order to bring an end to this murderous madness and ensure that such scenes will never be repeated anywhere."

Tragically, this is not the first time that chemical weapons have been used against the Syrian people. As reported by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, three out of the four previous chemical attacks in Syria were conducted by the Al-Assad regime. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant carried out the fourth. We cannot sit idly by and allow such cruel acts to continue. Now more than ever, we have to act and combine our efforts to finally end these atrocities. The international community must fulfil its obligation from 2013 and fully remove these horrible weapons from Syria.

As a State founded by refugees, Israel is deeply sensitive to the unprecedented numbers of refugees and migrants that have emerged in recent years. Israel has been doing its part to assist those in need. Israeli non-governmental organizations have been working to try to alleviate the suffering of refugees. For instance, IsraAid, a non-governmental organization that specializes in providing life-saving disaster relief and long-term support, has created the Global Asylum Seeker Crisis Response Programme in order to specifically assist refugees fleeing to Europe. Furthermore, Israeli hospitals continue to treat injured Syrians seeking medical assistance. Jamal, a Syrian boy who suffered a rocket attack that destroyed his leg, was in a coma for 20 days in an Israeli hospital. He was 7 years old at the time that he received treatment in 2015, meaning that for the majority of his life, he has known nothing but conflict and war. Like Jamal, thousands of Syrian children wake up to violence and know only fear.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

How can we watch such crimes, which befall thousands of men, women and children, be carried out by the Al-Assad regime? This week, he added the Khan Shaykhun massacre to his record, which already features massacres committed elsewhere in the country. Not a single governorate, town or neighbourhood in Syria has been spared an Al-Assad massacre. The massacres continue. The regime will not stop bombing, shelling, impoverishing, killing and maiming its own people. The international community cannot conceivably keep watching without doing anything. The situation has crossed all limits. We have to send a clear message to the Al-Assad regime that enough is enough.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico is participating in this debate because it represents an opportunity to discuss one of the most complex issues facing all Member States. After adopting the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1), we are beginning to glimpse the first global efforts to identify responses and deal with the situations faced by millions of people, which can make the difference between life and death.

First of all, we must recognize that when we speak of migrants and refugees, we are talking about human beings. Mexico has been and will continue to be a strong promoter of the rights of migrants, both inside and outside our borders. Mexico is a country of origin, transit, destination and return of migrants. It is a refugee host country. Mexico is committed to the security and dignity of these agents of progress and development. Despite the best efforts of some countries and the insistence of many others in favour of a political solution to the conflict in Syria, we continue to lament this serious humanitarian crisis, which has global consequences.

Refugees are not a source of insecurity. They are protagonists of suffering. The year 2017 has been more dangerous than 2016 for migrants and asylum-seekers. In the first three months of this year, 2.4 per cent of all migrants arriving in the Mediterranean perished,

compared with 1.4 per cent over the same period in 2016. Transnational organized crime organizations, migrant smugglers and traffickers take advantage of gaps in international cooperation in order to exploit their victims. This phenomenon is not unique to a single region. Where there is no shared responsibility, the unnecessary suffering of migrants and refugees is present.

We salute those Governments and members of civil society who have joined the efforts to save lives. The thousands of volunteers whom we see at sea and on the ground renew our faith in the power of humankind. As long as they save lives, it is up to us to effectively coordinate efforts to take on the causes and address the manifestations of migration with a comprehensive, cooperative and human-centred approach that results in communities where each person can fully realize their capabilities.

The international community faces the greatest opportunity in history to move towards a true governance of migration with a human face. The global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, whose preparatory process we adopted yesterday, will allow us to promote sustainable development through well-managed migration policies. The next few years will require concerted efforts and political will in a framework of inclusive, open and transparent dialogue. In that regard, we call upon all Member States to begin to implement the commitments contained in the New York Declaration as soon as possible.

We note with alarm the feelings of discrimination, xenophobia and racism that promote the migrant as a factor of unemployment for nationals of destination countries. In fact, migrants are a factor of development for these countries, which has been statistically demonstrated. We reject indications that qualify migrants as risk factors for the preservation of national cultures. Far from it, refugees and migrants enrich their host societies. Speaking out against xenophobia, hatred and hostility towards foreigners is not enough; we must also foster social cohesion and inclusion. Mexico is proud to have launched a national campaign along with Secretary-General Guterres. As we work hand in hand with the United Nations, we fight to uphold the rights of refugees and migrants and to denounce xenophobia.

Let us have the courage to acknowledge the artificial pragmatism in the hate speech derived from ill-conceived extreme nationalist ideologies. Let us have the strength to condemn and reject the barbarism and perversion of those who take advantage of the plight of migrants and make them a target of racism. Let us be fully mindful and astute in the best interest of humankind. Mexico joins in solidarity with all migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers around the world and waits for the day when this United Nations agenda item will be recalled as a historic watershed — the day we decided to walk on the right side of history.

Mr. Cerutti (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting, whose aim is to raise awareness worldwide about the tragic plight of refugees and migrants, in particular Syrian asylum-seekers in the Mediterranean basin.

Switzerland is deeply concerned about the extent of the situation and about the human tragedies that are concealed by the figures we just heard. Our country is determined to assist in finding lasting solutions to the complex challenges inherent in this situation. To that end, we must take action on two fronts. First, we must find ways to prevent such tragic situations from occurring in future and, secondly, we must improve life for those who were forced to leave their country. First and foremost, prevention must be at the centre of our concerns. The lack of respect for international humanitarian law during hostilities is a major cause of forced displacement, in Syria in particular. It is time for action. We must find political solutions to the armed conflicts responsible for so much suffering and put an end to violations of international law.

If our prevention efforts are ineffective, our second priority must be to improve the lives of those who have been forced to leave their home country. The current levels of displacement cause humanitarian challenges, in particular in terms of offering protection and in finding lasting solutions. Switzerland reiterates the need for respect for international law in host and transit countries for migrants and refugees.

In conclusion, let me recall that the drafting of the two global compacts is a unique opportunity for us to work together. The objective will be to develop a robust framework that addresses the root causes of conflict and forced displacement, considers the vulnerability of migrants and refugees and strengthens their rights and, finally, contributes to the effective management of international migration. The only way to solve today's

migration challenges is by working together and by demonstrating strong political will.

Mr. Krapp (Germany): We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union on behalf of its member States.

Today's debate is important because it reminds us that the tragedy experienced by irregular migrants in the Mediterranean is still ongoing. This year, tens of thousands of people have undertaken a dangerous journey to Europe and hundreds have lost their lives along the way. The number of people taking that route has only risen. So far this year, nearly 25,000 migrants and refugees have reached Italy by boat, compared with only 19,300 during the same period last year. Many countries around the world have responded to that tragedy by hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants. Although Germany in particular and the European Union in general are doing a great deal to support the refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, it is clear that no single country or region can tackle the refugee and migration crisis on its own. The tools of domestic and regional policy are simply not sufficient. This is a global crisis that demands a global response with globally shared responsibility.

In that light, Germany strongly welcomes the progress towards establishing a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and a global compact on refugees. We urge all States Members of the United Nations to help develop those crucial tools needed to address large-scale migration and displacement around the world. Together with Morocco, Germany has assumed the chairmanship of the Global Forum on Migration and Development for the negotiation period of the global compact on migration. We will use our chairmanship to advance the global compact and to support its negotiations, but we need to do more than create tools for responding to large movements of people. We also need to take concrete steps to support those in need right now, such as the millions of Syrians suffering in one of the most devastating conflicts of our time.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is appalling. Millions of people have been internally displaced or have fled the war, destruction and terror in their home country, most of them seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Such countries have shown unprecedented generosity in hosting so many refugees despite the social challenges that they themselves face. In 2016, nearly 900,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Germany. Germany is proud to be one of the largest humanitarian donors and long-term investors in infrastructure, education and jobs in the context of the Syrian conflict. Since 2012, Germany has contributed €2.8 billion in aid to support Syria and its neighbouring countries. We also contribute substantially to United Nations agencies and other humanitarian and development partners, which provide assistance to the 11 million refugees and internally displaced persons in Syria and the region.

Two days ago at the Syria Conference in Brussels, Germany pledged an additional €1.1 billion in aid to the people of Syria and the region, on top of the pledge we made in London in 2016. The pledged amount is the largest of any State. Humanitarian funding is no doubt important, but pledges by themselves cannot guarantee that aid will reach the people who need it. Nearly 5 million Syrians live in hard-to-reach areas and cannot count on regular supplies of humanitarian aid. The situation is particularly tragic for the approximately 650,000 people living in areas under siege.

That is why Germany is working intensively to improve humanitarian access and protect civilians and aid workers in Syria, especially those who are part of the humanitarian task force of the International Syrian Support Group. Aside from providing acute humanitarian aid, it is crucial that we ensure that refugees have a safe place to go. However, host communities are increasingly reaching their limits, and the situation in many refugee camps is tense. The aim of German development policy is not to leave the region to its own devices to cope with those challenges. What we want is for people to regain control of their lives. That is most crucial. People need prospects for a better future, and they must be put in a position in which they can provide for themselves.

To that end, Germany's development support in the region follows a three-pronged approach: education for children, vocational training for the young and jobs for the older demographic. Germany is one of the largest donors in the education sector in Syria and neighbouring countries. In 2016, we provided €245 million to support primary and secondary education and vocational training while reaching 1.3 million children and adolescents. Since 2014, Germany has also contributed €142 million to UNICEF in support of the "Reaching all children with education in Lebanon" programme. That programme is part of the international No Lost

Generation initiative, which helped more than 200,000 Syrian children in Lebanon attend school in 2016.

In the same spirit, we launched our partnership for prospects initiative at the beginning of 2016. Its primary aim is to create short- to medium-term employment opportunities and provide a source of income. By the end of 2016, we had helped approximately 61,000 people enter the work force, mainly through cash-for-work programmes and funding teachers' salaries. That is the path on which we will continue in 2017.

Finally and most importantly, we must solve the root causes of displacement in the countries of origin and transit if we are to be able to solve the crisis for the long-term. People undertake the dangerous journey to flee from war and terror. The Syrian civil war has already claimed more than 400,000 lives and made refugees of more than 11 million people. We therefore need to continue the talks in Geneva so as to find a political solution. We strongly support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to find common ground, and we urge all parties to the talks to work together for lasting peace in Syria. As the German Foreign Minister emphasized only this week in Brussels, we need a political solution to the conflict. Otherwise, we will not be able to stabilize the country, and refugees will not be able to return to their homes. Without a political solution, we will continue treating the symptoms but not the underlying causes.

Ms. Mwangi (Kenya): I thank the President for convening this debate on global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean basin, with specific emphasis on Syrian asylum-seekers.

I also thank Mr. Volker Türk, the United Nations Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, and Mr. Ashraf El Nour, Permanent Observer for the International Organization for Migration to the United Nations, for their statements.

My delegation stands in solidarity with all asylum-seekers who are fleeing conflict and are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. They need our support and deserve to be treated in a humane and dignified manner as we seek a political settlement to all conflicts, including that in Syria. That can be achieved only through implementing fair and effective asylum procedures.

According to the International Organization for Migration, for 2017 alone, as of February the number of deaths of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean was estimated at 663 and, as of the beginning of this month, approximately 29,000 migrants and refugees had arrived in Europe. That represents approximately 11 deaths per day, and a majority of those who died came from Africa, including women and children. Those numbers confirm that people who are fleeing conflict areas and are in need of international protection will continue to seek safety in Europe and beyond regardless of push back, high-handed vetting procedures and denial of access to asylum procedures.

While crossing the Mediterranean is a particularly dangerous endeavour prone to tragedy, it has not deterred persons seeking safety from attempting to cross the Mediterranean to seek asylum in Europe. Rather, it has generated demand for migrant smugglers and organized criminal actors who ferry migrants on unseaworthy vessels, which often turn into death chambers. We have a duty to disrupt and seize migrant smuggling businesses in order to save lives.

To that end, we have established the frameworks that will guide our work in providing the means for safe and orderly migration. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the third International Conference on Financing for Development, and the upcoming global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration accord us the opportunity to end the tragedy and suffering of migrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe. That will require political will, upscaling of funding resources and adherence to human rights law and humanitarian law. Recipient and destination counties have to adhere to humanitarian law.

The 2030 Development Agenda has provided us with a framework to address the root causes of conflict and the involuntary movement of refugees and migrants by integrating migration into its Goals and targets. It calls on us to: respect the human rights of all migrants regardless of migration status; take into account the vulnerabilities of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons; address forced displacement and humanitarian crises; and eradicate human trafficking.

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1) commits us to assuming the shared responsibility of managing large movements of refugees and migrants in a humane, sensitive and

people-centred manner. The global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration will support the safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. It will also provide for the establishment and expansion of safe, regular pathways for migration and greater international cooperation that will improve migration governance.

We have the opportunity to address the issue of irregular migration by recommitting to: addressing the drivers that create or exacerbate irregular migration; cooperating to create conditions that allow communities to live in peace in their homelands; combating the exploitation, abuse and discrimination that is suffered by migrants; implementing the 2030 Agenda, one of the objectives of which is to eradicate extreme poverty and inequality; and combating trafficking in persons, the smuggling of migrants and contemporary forms of slavery.

As a country of origin, transit and destination of irregular migrants, Kenya is of the view that establishing humane and efficient asylum systems is also key to addressing the problem of migrants and asylum-seekers in the Mediterranean basin, be they from Syria or elsewhere. We join other delegations in calling for increased support for countries of first asylum such as Turkey, Italy, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as countries in Africa such as Ethiopia, Libya and my own country, Kenya. We call for funding that can keep pace with the accelerated humanitarian needs.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At present, the situation of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean basin remains grave. This problem has also been growing for a long time in Africa and other regions with no apparent solution, which has caused broad concern from the international community and become a shared global challenge involving many complicated factors. Its root cause is regional instability and uneven development, and the fundamental solution is to achieve peace, stability and common development, strengthen international cooperation and improve global governance.

With respect to safeguarding international and regional peace and stability, all countries should adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and resolve their differences and disputes through political dialogue. The United Nations should play a lead role in strengthening good offices and mediation and in improving mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution, so as to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of peacekeeping operations. The international community should promote equal dialogue and exchange among different civilizations, resolutely fight against all forms of terrorism and avoid double standards.

The conflicts in Syria have lasted for seven years, subjecting the innocent people of Syria to disastrous suffering. It is our hope that the international community will join efforts in intensifying support to the United Nations as a principal mediation channel, consolidating the ceasefire and continuously promoting the hard-won process for a political settlement of the Syrian issue.

Secondly, with regard to helping developing countries achieve common development, we should help such countries strengthen their development capacity and improve the international environment for development. We should promote a more inclusive economic globalization that will benefit all and increase the voice of developing countries in global economic affairs. Full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be intensified. Developed countries should increase their official development assistance to countries of origin in Africa and the Middle East in order to raise their development level.

Thirdly, with respect to persisting in enhancing international cooperation on refugees and migration, origin, transit and destination States of refugees and migrants should strengthen solidarity and cooperation and shoulder their respective responsibilities. The countries concerned should receive refugees and migrants in the spirit of openness and inclusiveness, eliminate exclusionary and discriminatory practices towards refugees and migrants and help them to adapt to their new environments. Developed countries should increase humanitarian assistance to developing countries and international agencies.

Fourthly, with regard to continuing to improve global governance on refugees and migration, all States should implement the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in earnest and give full play to the role of such agencies as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The developing countries have hosted the majority of refugees in the world, so importance should

be attached to the concerns and roles of these countries, who should be given a greater voice. Strong emphasis should be given to the international negotiation process of the global compact on refugees and migrants.

On 18 January, President Xi Jinping addressed the United Nations Office in Geneva, advocating for creating a community with a shared future for humankind through exerting efforts to build a clean and beautiful world. At present, humankind is in a period of momentous development, transformation and changes, facing countless challenges and mounting risks. All countries of the world are interconnected and interdependent; their fates are inextricably intertwined. It is only through the creation of a community with a shared future that we can address the various risks and challenges, including the issue of refugees and migrants.

China attaches great importance to, and is deeply involved in, the settlement of the refugees and migrants question. China works hard to preserve international peace and stability, firmly supports developing countries' achievement of common development, and actively provides humanitarian assistance to some countries and international agencies. China has provided over ¥680 million in kind and in cash to assist the Syrian people, including Syrian refugees overseas. In January this year, China decided to give another ¥200 million to that end.

Recently, China provided an additional $1 million to the World Health Organization, UNICEF and UNHCR, respectively, to support their efforts in providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced people in some countries. Part of the funds in the China-United Nations Development Fund will also be used to support UNHCR and the IOM in their efforts to provide education, training and health services to refugees in countries such as Pakistan, Iran, Syria and Ghana.

China will join the international community in continuing its contribution to settling the global issue of refugees and migrants to the best of its ability.

Mr. Yaacob (Malaysia): Just a couple of days ago, at least 70 people, including 11 children, were killed in an attack in Idlib, Syria. Chemical weapons were reportedly used in the cowardly attack there. Malaysia condemns the use of chemical weapons in the strongest terms and calls for a swift investigation to ensure perpetrators of this heinous act be held to account.

The brutal war in Syria, which has gone on for more than six years, has taken a heavy toll on innocent civilians, causing massive displacements as they seek refuge from the conflict. In the context of irregular migration in the Mediterranean basin, we view the sheer number of fatalities among those attempting the Mediterranean crossing as a humanitarian crisis in itself. The harrowing visuals of migrants failing in their bid to make it to shore is seared in our collective conscience.

In horrendous exploitation of the misery of those migrants, unscrupulous human smugglers and traffickers seek to profit from them by offering passage across the Mediterranean while charging exorbitant rates. We condemn the atrocious nature of smugglers feeding off the vulnerabilities of those affected by armed conflict, who are merely seeking a better life elsewhere. This situation cannot be allowed to continue.

One aspect that requires our urgent attention is the rising number of xenophobic acts against refugees. The surge in the phenomenon of irregular migrants and refugees we are now witnessing is testing the limits of human rights values on a constant basis, particularly on the treatment of those crossing borders. We are concerned by the testimony of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that racial and ethnic profiling in law enforcement is pervasive at official border crossings and transportation hubs, despite the fact that such acts are fundamentally discriminatory in nature. These acts committed against refugees threaten the integrity of international human rights law, and we need to provide guidance to law-enforcement agencies through enforceable regulations, inter alia.

In the face of such humanitarian tragedy, my delegation holds the view that it is incumbent upon the international community to take decisive action. We cannot afford to wait and must respond to the alarming situation of irregular migration across the globe, either in the Mediterranean Sea, which now represents the world's most dangerous border crossing, or elsewhere, and the rising xenophobia against refugees.

In this context, my delegation is of the view that implementation of the relevant framework, as well as United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2240 (2015), which Malaysia co-sponsored together with other delegations, is of great significance. The resolution calls for action to stop human smugglers and traffickers within certain parameters and with

specificity that gives priority to the preservation of life and the safety and security of migrants, in accordance with applicable international standards.

My delegation also commends the willingness of regional organizations such as the European Union and the African Union to address the situation of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean basin. The adoption of the Political Declaration at the 2015 Valletta Summit and the joint Valletta Action Plan, adopted a couple of months ago, has provided a solid framework for addressing the tragedy of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the Together initiative, launched last year during the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants, has provided the basis for a global platform for creating a strong and persuasive narrative of solidarity with refugees and migrants, while also acknowledging the legitimate concerns of host communities. Looking ahead, I would like to take this opportunity to affirm our commitment to contributing to the work of the United Nations on addressing the situation, including its aim to adopt a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration in 2018.

Malaysia shares the views of others on the importance of addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement resulting from States' fragility and insecurity. While we commend today's deliberations and their focus on Syrian asylum-seekers, my delegation would also like to highlight the fact that the challenges posed by conflicts, the persecution of civilians and networks of people-smugglers and human traffickers are not confined to the Mediterranean alone. Other regions, including my own in South-East Asia, are not immune to such challenges either. Two years ago, we were faced with the challenge of addressing the irregular movements of people in the Andaman Sea. We therefore firmly believe that the information we take away from our deliberations today will also help us to address the issue in our own region.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to inform the General Assembly that my Government is committed to taking in 3,000 Syrian refugees over the next three years, as my Prime Minister announced during the general debate of the Assembly at its seventieth session (see A/70/PV.22). To date, we have welcomed a total of 79 Syrian refugees to Malaysia, and the administrative process for another 200 is under way. Though it is not a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, Malaysia, as a responsible member of the international community, is extending assistance to the Syrian people in their time of need.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): We believe it is important and timely for the international community to address the situation facing refugees and do whatever is in its power to minimize their plight and suffering. I would like to raise two basic points that I believe are crucial to how the international community, and the United Nations in particular, should approach the case at hand and other similar cases.

First, refugees are the object of shared international responsibility and protection, for which burden-sharing and a collective response are vital requirements if refugees are to be systematically protected. The international community and the United Nations should do their utmost to support refugees and the countries that host them with impartiality and based on humanitarian principles. In reality, however, that has not been the case. In recent decades, a few developing countries have hosted almost the entire world population of refugees, using their own scarce resources and going mostly unnoticed. In Iran's case, it has hosted millions of refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq for decades, and continues to do so with minimal national support, attention and assistance — or none at all. However, where migrants in the Mediterranean are concerned, a good deal of attention has been given to the problem. While we welcome the international community's serious efforts to deal with that specific situation, we continue to believe that all refugees, and all the countries that host them, deserve similar attention, and that all refugee crises should be dealt with by the international community on an equal footing.

Secondly, it is crucial to recognize that refugees and asylum-seekers are symptoms of deeper problems. The issue of refugees in our region is neither new nor unknown. Millions of Palestinians have been taking refuge in neighbouring countries for more than six decades now, as a result of the Israeli occupation. Today's wave of refugees in the Mediterranean basin fleeing the horrors of war, conflict and violence at home is the result of foreign intervention and pre-emptive wars followed by eruptions of terrorism and extremism. If the international community wants to take a responsible approach to the issue, it must tackle its root causes and wage a concerted global fight against intervention and occupation as well as terrorism and violent extremism. The illegal missile strikes that happened just last night are a clear instance of irresponsible and dangerous acts

that not only embolden terrorists but force more people into displacement. Such unilateral acts of aggression, which are grave violations of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the underlying norms of international law, could also undermine international initiatives, including those of the United Nations, to end terrorism and violent extremism in Syria.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been the biggest victim of chemical weapons in contemporary history and condemns any use of such weapons, regardless of the perpetrators or their victims. Nonetheless, we strongly condemn last night's missile attack by the United States on a Syrian air base in response to Syria's alleged use of chemical weapons. We consider such an excuse for unilateral action to be dangerous and destructive, and a violation of fundamental principles of international law. Iran believes that such acts of aggression — in which the timing, perpetrators and beneficiaries are all suspect — will complicate the situation not just in Syria but in the entire region.

The Islamic Republic of Iran remains steadfast in its determination to work with the international community to genuinely tackle the suffering that violent extremism and terrorism have inflicted on innocent displaced women and children.

Mr. Morales López (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the President for convening today's plenary meeting on a topic of broad global concern that demands our special attention. Major movements of refugees and migrants and the consequences they bring, not just on the humanitarian front but also in relation to social and economic development, require participation and commitment on the part of all of us. Ensuring the human rights of migrants and refugees should be a priority for our States.

Today's challenges are unprecedented. It is estimated that more than 65 million people have had to leave their countries in order to safeguard their lives. We cannot forget that refugees, including the vast majority of Syrian refugees, continue to live below the poverty line and at risk of their lives. Millions of women and children suffer in abhorrent situations that are very often created by groups of criminals who take advantage of their vulnerability, which leads to more violence and misfortune. It is for that reason that only through solidarity, cooperation and a people-centred approach can the effective protection of the rights and freedoms of all migrants regardless of their status, and of refugees be ensured.

There are many advantages to rising globalization, and not only in relation to goods and services. There are also advantages for human mobility, which undeniably aids in the sustainable development of countries of origin, transit and destination. Migration has the power to transform the lives of people families, and societies. Migrants are a source of experience, skills, culture and boundless energy that make their host countries and communities much richer and more diverse. That is why we echo the call to eliminate all forms of discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

We acknowledge the efforts made by the United Nations through the campaign Together — Respect, Security and Dignity for All, which protects the rights of refugees and migrants. We also strongly support the effective implementation of the New York Declaration (resolution 71/1), of 2016, which is an unprecedented milestone in strengthening the global governance of migration and international refugee law. We firmly believe that, through the global compact on refugees and the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, we will build an international architecture for those seeking a better life, in many instances, free from war, conflict or poverty, plain and simple.

Colombia believes that illegal trafficking in migrants is a crime that undermines the sovereignty of States, and that migrants who are victims of such a crime should not be criminalized or discriminated against for exercising their right to migrate. In that regard, actions aimed at addressing illegal trafficking in migrants must always be respectful of the rights of migrants and maintain the focus on combating the criminal networks that engage in that crime. We are confident that the global compact will help to foster political discussion on migration flows and their scope. We also welcome the creation of the thematic group to discuss trafficking in migrants, trafficking in persons and other contemporary forms of slavery. That will be the starting point to comprehensively address such phenomena at the hemispheric level.

As a country, Colombia has experienced an internal armed conflict, which, since 1985, has, unfortunately, resulted in many victims and internally displaced persons. Since the Victims Law was passed in 2011, the national Government has assumed responsibility for bridging the gap between offering assistance to

the victims of internal displacement and achieving social inclusion. We have worked to design and implement lasting solutions, such as the socioeconomic stabilization of victims, through the development of various development policies, including access to housing, health, education, psychosocial care, justice and income generation.

Ms. Amadeo (United States): The United States looks forward to continuing our engagement in the development of a global compact on refugees and a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. We appreciate the contributions of the many Member States, international organizations, United Nations offices and agencies and non-governmental organizations that are participating in the processes. As we embark on the development of the two global compacts, I would like to reflect specifically on the humanitarian needs precipitated by the crisis in Syria and the responsibility of Member States to help end the suffering in Syria.

The conflict in Syria has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. Half of all Syrians are displaced from their homes, including more than 5 million who have fled as refugees to neighbouring countries. Despite multiple calls to allow unimpeded humanitarian access to Syrians in need, multiple parties to the conflict, principally the regime and its backers, continue to block aid deliveries to people in need in areas not under its control, including desperately needed food and medical supplies. As a leading donor to the humanitarian response, the United States finds that unacceptable. We need a genuine ceasefire and real humanitarian access in Syria. All parties with influence over combatants on both sides must ensure compliance.

Supported by Russia and Iran, Syria's regime has committed atrocities against its own people for more than six years. We are horrified by this week's chemical-weapons attack in Syria, which bears all the hallmarks of the Al-Assad regime's cruelty. We know that Mr. Al-Assad has gassed his own people before and that Tuesday's incidents were the worst chemical attack in Syria since 2013. Anyone who inflicts suffering like that on his own people is a criminal and must be held accountable. So far, Mr. Al-Assad has made it clear that he does not want to participate in a meaningful political process. Iran and Russia have emboldened him on the battlefield and, just in February of this year, Russia shielded his regime from United Nations sanctions for its chemical-weapons use. As a result of this most recent atrocity in Khan Shaykhun, the United States initiated a strike against the Shayrat air field in Syria. That site was associated with the Syrian regime's chemical-weapons programme and directly linked to this horrific chemical-weapons attack.

I want to take a moment to reflect on the conference in Brussels earlier this week and thank those Member States that made generous pledges to assist the Syrian people. The United States believes that humanitarian assistance contributes to stability and, ultimately, strengthens our collective security. That is why in Brussels we announced more than $566 million in additional life-saving assistance for Syria and Syrian refugees in the region. The United States has now provided more than $6.5 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syrian crisis. That reflects the United States' compassion and leadership in addressing the unprecedented magnitude of suffering in Syria. The funding will also help mitigate the impact of the crisis on Governments and communities throughout the region.

In closing, the United States continues to support the United Nations-led peace process for Syria. We continue to stand beside Special Envoy De Mistura as he works tirelessly to bring all sides of the conflict together to advance a political solution. We call on all civilized nations to join us in seeking an end to the terrible conflict in Syria and to end terrorism in all its forms.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is aware of the importance of addressing a topic of such relevance to humanitarian agenda — the tragic plight of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean basin.

In 2016, more than 5,000 people either died or went missing during perilous sea crossings, and, in the first four months of this year, the numbers already stand at approximately 700 people, despite the adoption of relevant Security Council resolutions. We are deeply concerned about the serious humanitarian emergency affecting refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants — the by-product of the tragic wars, political destabilization, poverty, terrorism and widespread violence that plague large areas of Africa and the Middle East — who try desperately, risking their very lives, to reach safer locations. Venezuela expresses its solidarity with the thousands of those who are missing

or who died when making those dangerous crossings to flee conflict situations and other threats.

As we said in 2016, when this topic was included on the General Assembly's agenda, we believe that focusing the discussion on Syria alone to address the deaths and disappearances of thousands of migrants and asylum-seekers who were attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea illustrates the politics of selectivity, which contradicts the broad and multifaceted nature of the topic. In this regard, we reiterate our reservations about singling out one country for discussion as the right way to approach this important issue in an comprehensive and appropriate manner.

According to different statistics, including estimates made by United Nations agencies on the issue and from the International Organization for Migration, Syrian nationals constitute approximately 21 percent of the deaths or disappearances that occur in the Mediterranean. The remaining 79 percent of victims are nationals of other fraternal countries in Africa and the Middle East. These data show that the use of the Mediterranean route to reach Europe is not an exclusive trend of a particular State, in this case, Syria. We therefore ask why we should concentrate on only one country of origin and selectively dismiss the greater percentage of victims, who come from other nations.

As Venezuela has expressed on previous occasions, we believe that while the serious humanitarian consequences of the Syrian conflict must be urgently addressed, the causes that drive the conflict must be eliminated and the conflict brought to an end, including the geopolitical agendas of some States Members of the United Nations that put their interests before the real political solution of the war in Syria, promoting it directly and indirectly. To that end, we reject the politicization of the humanitarian issue, as it serves the interests of Powers that are negatively affecting the stability of the region, and today, are seeking, with a cynical two-faced morality, to become standard-bearers for the humanitarian cause, even though they are the ones mainly responsible for the Syrian tragedy.

The imposition of war in Syria, together with the ensuing humanitarian tragedy, is a contemptible fact, to which is added the unwillingness to make real progress on a political solution. In this regard, we urge pursuing in good faith the long-term task of reaching a peaceful, inclusive, sustainable and real solution to the conflict in Syria, where all legitimate stakeholders come together in good faith to support diplomacy as a proven tool for resolving differences and fostering dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation — all this with the ultimate and supreme aim of achieving peace without preconditions and respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Syria.

To all those who promote destabilization and war, we ask that they bear in mind that the significant increase in these flows of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees to Europe and other continents is a consequence of the terrible conditions of violence and social disarticulation caused by conflicts and military aggression in such countries of the South as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, as well as by the widespread violence in the Sahel and Africa, where the nationals of these countries are dying as they undertake dangerous journeys in their attempt to aspire to have dignified and just life opportunities for themselves and their families, to seek a better life or just to flee the war, extreme violence and terrorism that are hurting them.

We see with alarm how in addition to the suffering that these human beings undergo from living in an environment of conflict and threat, once they undertake these journeys and reach other continents, many of them are dehumanized, stigmatized and vilified by their origin, religion or ethnic status. We are witnessing how xenophobia, racism and intolerance continue to mark public discourse in many countries in Europe and America, provoking discrimination and violent actions against migrants and seekers of refuge, and the implementation of national policies designed to weaken the Convention on the Status of Refugees and its Protocol. In addition, it is immoral and deeply hypocritical that those who promote destabilization and crises do not respond with international law and with due attention and receptivity to the significant increase in these flows of seekers of asylum and refuge.

In conclusion, Venezuela considers that the management of this issue should be centred on respect for dignity and all human rights and should move away from any exclusionary, racist, xenophobic and discriminatory ideological vision against those who are seeking to preserve their integrity, reach for the possibility of having a better life and protect themselves from the threats of war. It is not by raising walls or securitizing the issue, nor by invoking Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, that we will address the underlying causes of the flow of asylum-seekers and refugees to different regions, which are exacerbated by

the dramatic humanitarian consequences resulting from the promotion of war at all costs and the unwillingness to reach real political solutions.

Our country wishes to express its deepest concern about the recent use of chemical weapons in Syria, a fact that we condemn and which must be investigated. But we also repudiate and condemn the unilateral actions taken by the United States, a permanent member of the Security Council, in bombing the Syrian Arab Republic. We call for the wisdom of all relevant stakeholders in this conflict. We ask that they act within the framework of multilateralism and refrain from provoking military escalations that negate the possibilities of finding political solutions to the current conflict.

History has shown that unilateralism is ineffective and has led only to desolation and more barbarism. The world must advance on the path of multilateralism and respect for the Charter of the United Nations as the only sustainable way to resolve conflicts that threaten world peace and security, in the hope that no more peoples will be destroyed or set adrift.

Mr. Kalamverzos (Greece): As a European Union frontline country, Greece welcomes today's exchange of views to raise global awareness of the tragedies of irregular migration in the Mediterranean, with an emphasis on Syrian asylum-seekers. Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and wishes to underline the following from its national point of view.

Respecting the rights, dignity and legitimate hopes of those who are forced to flee their homes has been our main priority. According to the most recent data of the Eurostat, in 2016, Greece received the largest number of asylum-seekers per million of its population and the largest raw number after Germany. Approximately 28 per cent of these asylum applicants are Syrians.

Since the migrant and refugee influx in 2015, Greece has made exceptional progress in upgrading its reception capacity and establishing a fully operational asylum system. As already affirmed in the European Union statement, the number of crossings from Turkey to Greece has been substantially reduced but not stopped altogether. At the same time, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of deaths in the Aegean Sea. The European Union-Turkey statement is indeed producing tangible results despite the challenging circumstances, and it should continue to be implemented by all sides. Nevertheless, we should remain vigilant, given that flows from the eastern Mediterranean route, although diminished, have not ceased. Most regrettably, the conflict in Syria continues.

The current challenges go beyond the Syrian refugee issue, and the need to address the root causes of regular migration remains a major challenge. In this context, we support the recent actions taken at the European Union-level in the field of partnership cooperation with third countries of origin and transit. We believe that the new Migration Partnership Framework is of paramount importance, as cooperation with and assistance to third countries is key for stemming and managing migration. We also strongly support the Valletta Action Plan between the European Union and African partners in an effort to strengthen cooperation with third countries of origin and transit and come to terms with the challenges and opportunities presented by migration.

Legal and organized migration must now be supported by an increase in the number of people directly received from reception centres in third countries. That would help to prevent further loss of life and ensure the safe, legal and organized entry and reception of refugees in the European Union. Strengthening the resettlement programme, in close cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, would also deal a critical blow to human-smuggling and trafficking networks. As international leaders stressed at the Summit for Refugees and Migrants last September, migration is a global issue with political, social, humanitarian, human rights and economic ramifications. For that reason, close and coordinated cooperation should guide our actions in the days to come.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Several representatives have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Shurbaji (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, we denounce the attempts of the representative of the United States to use this rostrum to justify its wanton aggression against Syria, which runs counter to the principles and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and to its status as a permanent member of the Security Council. This is

an irresponsible, short-sighted act that is naive and propagandic in nature. The main aim of this aggression requires serious explanation, since it serves only the interests of terrorist groups, particularly Da'esh and Jabhat Ansar al-Din.

Syria has never used chemical weapons and strongly condemns those who do. We will never use such weapons, even against those terrorists who target our people daily. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic categorically rejects the misrepresentation of facts and the false accusations, and stresses that it will continue to implement all its international obligations and will continue to fight terrorism, without succumbing to any political blackmail or any propagandic efforts by those who seek to utilize the tragedy in their favour.

As for the representative of Israel, who represents the forces of occupation, he probably believes that his audacity and boldness will obscure the criminal acts committed by his country. We wonder about the veracity of his statement concerning Israel's sensitivity to the increasing number of immigrants and refugees, since that country has itself caused the dispersion and fleeing of hundreds of thousands of refugees, while also continuing to inflict harm and commit criminal acts against them. It is well known to all that most of those suspected of committing the worst crimes are members of terrorist groups that have been supported by Israel, logistically, militarily and otherwise.

What is happening in Syria today is one of the worst crises in the history of humankind. Today, the Israeli representative has shed crocodile tears over the tragedy instead of having his country do the right thing, which is to withdraw to the borders of June 1967 and enable all those refugees to return to their homes.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would just like to say a few words in connection with the disturbing statement made by the representative of the United States.

The American strikes on Syria on the night of 7 April were a violation of international law and an act of open aggression against a sovereign State. My Government's position is clear. The use of chemical weapons by anyone is totally unacceptable in any circumstances. The tragedy in Khan Shaykhun should be the subject of a very careful and objective investigation. However, without waiting to find out what actually happened, the United States has just offered a show of force against a country that is struggling with international terrorism.

Russia, as all are aware, provides the Government of Syria with support in its struggle against international terrorism. The United States is acting as though it did not understand some evident things. It closed its eyes to chemical weapons use in Iraq, which was officially reported by the authorities of the country. It disregarded the documented use of chemical weapons by terrorists in Aleppo. That can only encourage and strengthen international terrorism, which could lead to further attacks using such weapons of mass destruction. It is also an attempt to distract the world's attention from what is happening in Mosul, where hundreds of civilians have died and hundreds of thousands have become refugees, creating a growing humanitarian tragedy there — and all that is partially the result of the actions of the American-led coalition.

Mr. Amer (Israel) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am going to answer the accusations made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

For many reasons, what was said by the Syrian regime does not deserve any answer. It does not even convince those who utter it. It is the discourse of the intelligence services. The regime makes its people eat the leaves of the trees. This is a regime that specializes in dropping barrel bombs on its people. It is a regime of atrocity.

I do not want to respond. Often, we use the right of reply to respond to the accusations of others. However, today I am not going to defend the State of Israel. Israel is a democratic country, developed and strong. There is no need to defend Israel. Allow me to use the right of reply to say one word on behalf of millions of those in need of someone to defend them. What is happening in Syria is the worst humanitarian crisis in the Middle East. The thugs of the regime say "either Al-Assad or we will burn down the country". Indeed, they have burned down the country. They have burned everything. They have burned the people and the plants. Half a million people have been killed, and millions have been displaced. When is this going to stop?

Mrs. Shurbaji (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the occupying Power may be right. A reply should not be made to the accusations levelled at Israel. Israel is not being accused. We are speaking of facts. The State of Israel is only an occupying Power, the daily crimes of which compound those it has committed against the Palestinians and the Syrians. These are well-known facts that require no

confirmation. International law obliges the occupying Power to withdraw from the lands it has occupied and to return them to their rightful owners. The international community should hold it accountable for the crimes it has committed and continues to commit, particularly with regard to the Golan Heights and Syria in general.

The Acting President: The General Assem thus concluded this stage of its consideration of item 131.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.